

Reversing Babel

By David Feddes

Pentecost was a great outpouring of the Holy Spirit on God's people. There are many different aspects to that coming of the Holy Spirit. Today I want to focus on how Pentecost is a reversal of what happened at the Tower of Babel. Let's begin by reading the story from Genesis 11 of the Tower of Babel.

Now the whole earth had one language and the same words. As people migrated from the east, they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. They said to one another, "Come, let's make bricks and burn them thoroughly." They had brick for stone and bitumen (or tar) for mortar. Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens. Let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth."

The Lord came down to see the city and the tower which the children of man had built. The Lord said, "Behold, they are one people, and they all have one language, and this is only the beginning of what they will do. Nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them. Come, let us go down there and confuse their language, so that they may not understand one another's speech." So the Lord dispersed them from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city. Therefore its name was called Babel, because there the Lord confused the language of all the earth. From there, the Lord dispersed them over the face of all the earth (Genesis 11:1–9).

Now, the Lord said to Abram, "Go from your country, and your kindred, and your father's house, to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse. In you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Genesis 12:1–3).

God's imagers and sons

Let's backtrack from the Tower of Babel a moment, all the way back to the beginning. God created the world, and God created humanity. Even before he did that, he had others whom he had made, who were with him and who were his Council. The Old Testament sometimes refers to them as the sons of God. God, for instance, says to Job, "Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth, and all the sons of God shouted for joy?" (Job 38:4,7). Already, when God was making the world, the supernatural beings in the heavenly realms were working with him and observing and praising him.

God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness" (Genesis 1:26). Why did he say "let us"? Because he is speaking to the Divine Council—to the sons of God—who were already there with him, rejoicing in his work and collaborating with him. When you read about the genealogy of Jesus, it traces all the way back to Adam, the son of God (Luke 3:38).

What was God up to when he had these sons of his who were imaging him already in the heavenly realms, and then decided also to make a son who would image him in the earthly

realm? When we think about the sons of God who are with him in the heavenly realms, the Bible speaks of them as the assembly of the holy ones, the sons of God, the Council of the holy ones. That's why the Lord is sometimes called the God of hosts.

Psalm 89 says, “The heavens will praise your wonderful deed, O Yahweh, even your faithfulness in the assembly of the holy ones. For who in the sky is equal to Yahweh? Who is like Yahweh among the sons of God? A God feared greatly in the Council of the holy ones and awesome above all surrounding him. O Yahweh God of hosts, who is mighty like you?” (Psalm 89:5–8).

When God made the heavens and the earth and formed humanity, he was not alone but was surrounded by these hosts. Yet the Bible never lets us think that these hosts who surround him are equal to him or on a par with him. God is far above them. There's none like him. He is more awesome than all who surround him. God enjoys company, and in the supernatural and heavenly realms, he enjoys these sons of God, the assembly of the holy ones. He decided in his earthly realm to make beings who would also image him and collaborate with him and rule on his behalf in earthly realms. We were created to be God's imagers.

When you read about the Garden of Eden, it was designed as a temple, a place for God to dwell in. When you read that God worked and created for six days and then rested on the seventh, that rest on the Sabbath was not God taking a nap after getting exhausted. It was God moving into his temple and enjoying that great garden he had made and enjoying it in company with human imagers that he had made. So the earthly imagers, Adam and Eve, were to be God's Council—to interact with him and act for God on earth—just as those heavenly imagers, those supernatural powers, were God's Council to consult with God and to act for him in heavenly realms. That's what we're designed to be, and that's who we're going to be again someday, only greater still: people who live in close communion with God in his sacred space that he's made—a beautiful garden, a temple, a place to worship. That's who we are meant to be, who we will be again someday by God's grace in Jesus Christ.

Failure and judgment

But the first humans failed. Adam and Eve sinned, and so that place—that sacred space where they could walk with God, and he with them, and enjoy his company, that place where heaven and earth connected—was a place they could no longer be in. They were kicked out. Some of God's heavenly imagers, the cherubim—mighty heavenly beings—blocked any entrance for Adam and Eve to that garden-temple of Eden.

As you read a little further in Genesis, you read that some fallen heavenly imagers—again, they're called the sons of God—interbred with human imagers, and they produced the Nephilim giants. God sent a great flood to deal with that whole terrible mess that had come from fallen angelic beings and fallen human beings.

That brings us to the next part of the story in Genesis. God starts over with Noah and his family. They're told to fill the earth, to be God's imagers throughout the earth again, and to rule it on God's behalf.

But as Noah's descendants multiply, they want to hang together, and they don't want to honor the true God or honor him his way. Humanity builds the Tower of Babel rather than spreading through the world. At that point, God scattered the nations. He disowned them, and he gave them over to the rule of other supernatural beings. I'll explain more about that in a moment, but that's basically what happened at Babel.

Stairway from heaven

What was going on at the Tower of Babel? When we would read that story as little kids in a picture book, or think about it in Sunday school, we'd think, "The bad thing about Babel was that they were trying to build a tower and make it a way for them to walk up to heaven." That would be kind of a dumb idea, but it's hard to understand why God would have to come down to thwart that. You could build quite a ways up, but even if you make it higher than the tallest skyscraper, you still wouldn't be anywhere near to the heavenly realm of God and his angels.

What was going on at the Tower of Babel? Any Israelite hearing that story would immediately recognize the sort of thing it was talking about. There were ziggurats—manmade mountains, basically. Everybody knew that mountains are the places where the gods come to earth. They're the high spots of earth. That's not where people go up to get to the gods; it's where the gods come down to be with the people. A tower was to be a manmade mountain for the god to come down.

Near the tower, they would have a temple, and the god would then come down in his essence. Ancient idol worshipers didn't really think that blocks of wood or metal were divine in and of themselves, but when they thought that when they made a tower, then a god would come down, and his essence would come into the image that they made. The people would do this as a favor to the gods—to give them a ladder down to inhabit their image. Then, when the god wasn't busy in the nearby temple, he would remain at the top of the ziggurat (tower) during his off hours to relax, enjoy himself, and have some of the food that people had prepared for him there.

So basically, the building of this was a manmade mountain so that you could bring the gods down and get them to do what you wanted. In this worldview that the builders of these towers had, the gods need people. That's why the gods made people: humans were to work for the gods and to provide food for them. Then in turn, if you did a good job for the gods, they'd do a nice job for you too. "You scratch my back, I'll scratch yours." The Tower of Babel was the supreme representation of the human attempt to control the god.

Confused and scattered

And God did come down. He said to the Divine Council, "Let's go down." But he did not come down to be manipulated by people or to allow them to make a name for themselves or to ignore his commands as the Supreme Lord. "Come, let us go down," he says to others of the Divine Council, "and there confuse their language so that they may not understand one another's speech." From there, the Lord dispersed them over the face of all the earth. He divided up the nations. This group that wanted to stay as one and wanted to manipulate God in their own way—he split them up and divided them.

If you read Genesis 10, you read about a whole bunch of different nations—70 nations that the world was divided into. Then chapter 11 tells you how it got that way. It backtracks a little bit and tells the story of the Tower of Babel to explain how God had scattered the people from that place of Babel. You don't read that directly in the Genesis 11 account, but you do read elsewhere in the Bible what was going on: "When the Most High gave to the nations their inheritance, when he divided mankind [at the Tower of Babel], "he fixed the borders of the peoples according to the number of the sons of God. But the Lord's portion is his people, Jacob his allotted inheritance" (Deuteronomy 32:8–9).

There are some old manuscripts that say "according to the number of the sons of Israel," but of course Israel did not even exist at the time of Babel. Other manuscripts have been found that are almost certainly the correct ones—that say God divided the nations according to the sons of God. Most scholars take that to mean that God divided up the nations and assigned them to principalities and powers and handed them over to the rule of those supernatural beings.

After scattering the nations from Babel, God chose Abraham. God decided, after scattering the nations and handing them over to other rulers, to choose Abraham to start over again and to have a portion for himself—to have a people whom he would work with directly and rule directly. Those to whom God handed over the nations—those powers—turned out, most of them, to be rebel powers.

Divided and disowned

Psalm 82 addresses them. It uses the word *Elohim* twice. *Elohim* sometimes refers to God himself, but it's actually plural and sometimes refers to the gods. "God has taken his place in the divine Council; in the midst of the gods he holds judgment: 'How long will you judge unjustly?'... 'You are gods, sons of the Most High, all of you; nevertheless, like men you shall die and fall like any prince.' Arise, O God, judge the earth, for you shall inherit all the nations" (Psalm 82:1–8). God is speaking to these other powers who have dominion over various nations and says, "What's happening in those nations is unjust." They are judging unjustly, and they are going to be judged by the God of all the earth.

Here's the situation: the nations have been handed over to evil powers. They've been divided and they've been disowned. God says through Moses in Deuteronomy: "Beware lest you raise your eyes to heaven, and when you see the sun and the moon and the stars, all the host of heaven, you will be drawn away and bow down to them and serve them—things that the Lord your God has allotted to all the peoples under the whole heaven" (Deuteronomy 4:19). At Babel God had basically said, "You want to do your own thing and worship your own way? I am going to give you over to other powers. I'm allotting these things to you." That is his judgment. The nations are divided and disowned—but not forever, and not permanently.

In the meantime, various peoples and nations, according to the Bible, have these various sons of God—or powers and principalities and dominions—affecting and influencing them in secret and very powerful ways. Sometimes the sons of God, the angelic beings, are carrying out his purposes. But some are rebels working against his purposes. At any rate, they are having an influence in the affairs of humanity.

Watchers and princes

In Daniel 4:17, King Nebuchadnezzar is addressed. He had become very proud and had been bragging about the great Babylon he had built. He is told, “The sentence is by the decree of the watchers, the decision by the word of the holy ones.” These watchers—these holy ones—have decided to take away Nebuchadnezzar’s power and his mind. It was ultimately a decree of God himself, but it was also the decree of the watchers and of the holy ones.

Later on, when Daniel is having a vision, an angel comes to him and speaks with him, but says he was delayed for 21 days by the prince of Persia. Then, near the end of the vision, the angel says, “Now I will return to fight against the prince of Persia, and when I go out, behold, the prince of Greece will come” (Daniel 10:13, 20). He’s talking about princes in unseen realms who are having a huge influence on the affairs of the various nations.

A chosen people

In short, humanity sinned at Babel. God scattered the nations. He disowned them and gave them over to other supernatural beings. That was the terrible judgment of Genesis 11.

Then God chose Abraham and Abraham’s offspring to carry on his purpose for creation, to display his glory, and to eventually bring blessing to all nations. It was not just that he chose Israel to be the exclusive people who would receive his blessing—they were to be a display of God’s glory to the nations and a source of God’s blessing to the nations in the fullness of time.

Conflicts and covenant

- God defeated Egypt’s gods and brought his people out (Exodus).
- God and his council came to Sinai, made a covenant with Israel, and gave the tabernacle as a place to live among them.
- God defeated Canaan’s gods, destroyed their giant offspring (Nephilim, Anakim), and gave Israel their land. (Joshua)

Let’s quickly go through the story running from Babel to Pentecost: God rescues his people from slavery in Egypt. He defeats Egypt’s gods and brings his people out. When you read of the plagues, God is in conflict with the gods of Egypt. When Moses and Aaron turned the water to blood, or when they threw a staff on the ground and it became a snake, the Egyptians did the same thing. You might wonder, “What tricks were they pulling?” But you’re misunderstanding the story if you think this was just some people doing tricks. In the Bible, God says, “I am going to judge the gods of Egypt” (Exodus 12:12). The gods of Egypt were mimicking God’s miracles. Those powers were real powers doing some things. But then God turned up the power so that after a while the gods of Egypt couldn’t do what he was doing anymore. It was more than they could handle. So the story portrays God’s conflict not only with Egypt but with Egypt’s gods—and God’s victory over them. He brings his people out.

Then you read that God and his Council came to Sinai. The Bible says it was through angels that God gave his law (Acts 7:53; Galatians 3:19; Hebrews 2:2). God and his Council came to Sinai.

God made a covenant with Israel, and he gave the tabernacle as a place where God would live among them.

After the tabernacle and the law had been given, God sent his people into Canaan and defeated Canaan's gods. He destroyed their giant offspring—what the Bible calls the Nephilim or the Anakim, the giants who were in the land—and God gave Israel their land. That's what you read about in the book of Joshua.

King, temple, holy land

- Israel did not totally destroy the giants and did not always reject their gods. (Judges)
- Philistine giants remained a threat. King David and his warriors destroyed them.
- Temple was to connect earth and heaven, an earthly picture of heavenly realities.
- Prophets kept calling Israel back to God.

But Israel didn't totally destroy the giants, and they didn't always reject those gods who had ruled over the Canaanite peoples either. The Philistine giants, for instance, remained a threat. King David and his warriors destroyed Goliath and other of those giants. That, again, is connected with some of the things you read about the sons of God or these supernatural powers.

In the time of David's son Solomon, the temple was built as a place in God's holy land to connect earth and heaven. It was to be an earthly picture of heavenly realities. As you went into the temple, it got more and more holy as you went farther, and fewer and fewer people were allowed access. Some could go into the outer courts. As you got into what was called the Holy Place, only the priests could go there. Then there was the Most Holy Place—the Holy of Holies. Only one person, once a year, could go there. But it was intended as a place where God would dwell in a special way and where his presence would be among his people.

Throughout that whole time, Israel had their ups and downs—probably more downs than ups—and God's prophets kept calling Israel back to God.

Failure and exile

- Kingdom was divided and corrupted. Ten tribes built their own shrines and were defeated and deported. Later the kingdom of Judah was defeated, the temple was destroyed, and the Jews were exiled.
- Some exiles returned and built a lesser temple. But many Jews remained scattered, and nations were not blessed.

Finally, of course, the kingdom was divided, and both divisions of the kingdom became more and more corrupt, again with some ups and downs. The ten tribes built their own shrines with their own golden calves. They were eventually defeated by Assyria, deported, and scattered among various nations. Later on, the kingdom of Judah was defeated, and their temple—that place where God was among them—was destroyed. Before the temple was destroyed, we read

that the glory of God departed from the temple (Ezekiel 10–11), and the Jewish people were exiled into many nations.

Later on, some exiles returned and they built a temple again, but it was not as splendid a temple as before. We never read that God's glory came down again in the cloud and in the fire to fill that temple. Even after many Jews came back, many other Jews remained scattered. So the nations were not blessed; God's calling of Abraham was not fulfilled. That second temple was not everything it was meant to be. The Jews remained largely scattered and the nations were not seeing the glory of God revealed in the people of Israel.

Messiah

- Jesus, Son of God, second Adam, prophet like Moses, Son of David, true temple, was faithful to God's purposes.
- Jesus' death paid for human sin and defeated the rebel supernatural beings.
- Jesus' resurrection launched a new creation in the Spirit's life and power.

Then Jesus came—Jesus, *the* Son of God, not just one of the sons of the gods but *the* Son of God, the second Adam, the prophet like Moses who had been foretold, the son of David who would rule over God's people forever, the Lion of the tribe of Judah. Jesus Christ, the true temple, spoke of his own body as the temple, the connection between heaven and earth. He was faithful to God's promises; he was the true Israelite, the seed of Abraham. When Jesus came, he lived the perfect life that God's imagers were supposed to live. When Jesus died, he paid for human sin, and his death put to shame the rebel supernatural beings; his death dealt a terrible blow to those hostile powers who had governed and ruined the nations. Jesus' resurrection was not just the return of Jesus to life; it was the launching of a whole new creation in the Holy Spirit's life and power. When Jesus ascended to heaven after his resurrection, he had promised that he would send his Holy Spirit in power upon his people, and that is what he did.

That is a quick version of the storyline from Babel to Pentecost. Exile and sadness were the main story of Israel from the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem up to the time of Jesus, when the Jews were under an occupying Roman force and many were scattered here, there, and everywhere. Even then, God was up to something.

Messianic missionaries

- Israel's exile was punishment for sin but also preparation for blessing all nations.
- Many Jews were in Jerusalem during the Pentecost feast, "devout men from every nation under heaven." (Acts 2:5)
- In one day the Holy Spirit made them an army of 3,000 Messianic missionaries familiar with many cultures.

Israel's exile was a punishment for sin, but God is very good at doing more than one thing at the same time. He was punishing the Israelites for their sin, but he was also using that exile to prepare to bless all the nations.

Many Jews were in Jerusalem during the Pentecost feast—devout men from every nation under heaven (Acts 2:5). In one day, when the Holy Spirit came upon the church, there was a ready-made group of people who had been Jewish exiles, who knew the languages of many nations and understood the cultures of many nations, gathered in one place in Jerusalem. When the Holy Spirit came in power on the apostles, he had a culturally trained mission force ready to hear the message and go back to their nations with good news of blessing. In one day, the Holy Spirit made them an army of three thousand Messianic missionaries who were familiar with many cultures.

“When the day of Pentecost arrived [seven weeks after Passover] they were all together in one place. Suddenly, there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting” (Acts 2:1-2). “It filled the house”—that phrase is used when God's glory came down centuries earlier upon the tabernacle and filled the house, or when it came down on the temple of Solomon and filled the house of God. Here, the Holy Spirit comes down and fills the house because this is where God's new temple is: where Jesus' followers are gathered. Jesus spoke of himself as God's new temple, and then his people become God's new temple. The Lord fills the house.

“Divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance” (Acts 2:3-4). In the Old Testament, when God would come with his holy ones of the Divine Council, fire would often be present. It certainly was on Mount Sinai. It was in Ezekiel's vision of the Lord of hosts, surrounded by the cherubim and the angels and the wheels of fire. But here, the tongues of fire come and divide and rest on each of the disciples. Once again, you see the pillar of fire in the Old Testament, which was over the nation of Israel. But now, the fire comes to each one individually. God's Holy Spirit comes in a new and wonderful way, inhabiting and empowering each of his individual people. They begin to speak in other tongues as the Spirit helps them.

“Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. At this sound, the multitude came together, and they were bewildered because each one was hearing them speak in his own language. They were amazed and astonished, saying, ‘Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? How is it that we hear, each of us, in his own native language—Parthians, Medes, and Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea, Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs—we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God’” (Acts 2:5–11). If you study this list of places, you find that it moves from east to west and covers roughly the same territory as the nations described in Genesis 10—the nations who had been split up at the Tower of Babel. God has people from all those nations hearing in their own language the mighty works of God.

“All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, ‘What does this mean?’ But others, mocking, said, ‘They are filled with new wine’” (Acts 2:12).

Then Peter gets up and gives his great Pentecost sermon and speaks of the resurrected Lord Jesus and the death of Christ for the sins of the people.

Pentecost vs. Babel

So Pentecost reverses Babel. At Babel, people built a manmade holy mountain, a stairway for gods to descend to their temple and to their image. People tried to control the divine. On Pentecost, God's Holy Spirit enters his true image and temple: the people of his church, who are headed by the Lord Jesus Christ. That's why it's wrong to make images to try to manipulate God or expect God to live in those images. We are God's images. We are meant to be filled with his Holy Spirit and to image him. On Pentecost, God launched that, and ever since he has been sending his Spirit into people from every nation.

At Babel, people wanted to control God and make a name for themselves. On Pentecost, God fills people and takes charge of them, and he glorifies the name of Jesus.

Babel was the Great Symbiosis. That's something scholars of ancient religions speak of. In biology, symbiosis is when animals work together and do each other favors. In ancient pagan religion, the gods created people to feed and care for them. If we satisfy the gods, they'll care for us. That's paganism all the way. You push the right button, and the god gives you what you want. But Pentecost is God's covenant of grace. God doesn't need us. He offers his love in Christ as a free gift. He calls us to rule and care for creation on his behalf. He has gifts for us and a purpose for us, but he is not desperate for our help, and we are not paying or controlling him in order to get what we want.

At Babel, God came down to judge and to weaken the efforts of rebel humans—to divide them up. On Pentecost, God came down to bless and to empower believing humans.

At Babel, God confused: he blocked sinful rebels from speaking the same language in their pride and idol-building. On Pentecost, God didn't confuse—he enlightened. The Spirit enabled Jesus' disciples to praise and preach in other languages, and the hearers understood and accepted the gospel. That's the most striking and obvious parallel between Babel and Pentecost. At Babel, languages were confused. At Pentecost, where they had been confused and people were speaking different languages, all of a sudden they understood each other again.

At Babel, God divided one group into many nations and scattered them. On Pentecost, God gathered many nations into one church and unified them. God does intend for humanity to be united again—but on his terms, not ours. So at Babel, he scatters. At Pentecost, he unifies.

At Babel, God handed all the nations over to the rule of lesser supernatural beings (and started over with Abraham and Israel). But at Pentecost, God called the nations away from those evil powers and their dominion, and he offered the nations his presence and his covenant promises.

Spirit renews all things

- Eden: breathing life into God's imagers
- Babel: communicating, unifying, sending
- Israel: chosen nation to bless all nations
- Sinai: new covenant law written on hearts

- Temple: Jesus, church and believers
- Exile: ready-made mission force

When you see what's going on throughout the history of redemption, and in the coming of the Holy Spirit, and you read the various parts of the Old Testament record, you see how the Holy Spirit re-creates. In **Eden**, God forms man from the dust of the ground and breathes into his nostrils the breath of life (Genesis 2:7). On Pentecost, God again breathes into his imagers. The very word *spirit* means *breath*. That's why we sing, "Breathe on me, breath of God, fill me with life anew." That's what God is doing at Pentecost. He's doing Eden all over again, in a new way, breathing into those who are meant to image him.

The Holy Spirit undoes **Babel**. Instead of confusion, he gives communication. Instead of division, the Holy Spirit brings unification. Yes, there is a kind of sending, like Babel—where people are scattered again, as the 3,000 from many nations are scattered and as God's apostles are sent out. But this time, it's not a scattering of curse. It's a scattering of blessing—to bring good news to the ends of the earth.

God chose **Israel** to be a blessing to the nations. Pentecost fulfilled that plan. When God sets his mind to do something, it happens. It didn't look like it for a long time. Israel failed again and again and again. But through Jesus Christ and the coming of the Holy Spirit, that chosen nation became a blessing to all nations—and included all nations. God says to Gentiles, to people of many other nations, "Now you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood," the identical words that he said to Israel, because now everybody who belongs to Christ is Israel and Abraham's seed.

At **Sinai**, God wrote on stone the commandments with the very finger of God. But he had already promised in the Old Testament, "I'm going to make a new covenant, a new deal, and I'm going to write my law on your hearts and send my Spirit to live in you and give you a new heart and a new spirit" (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezekiel 36:24-27). At Pentecost the Holy Spirit is doing a do-over of Sinai as well. This time he's not writing on stone tablets. He's writing in human hearts. He's giving power right inside us to love and obey him.

No longer is there a **temple** of stones and jewels and other things. Jesus is the temple. The church is the temple. Individual believers are spoken of as the temple of God. "You are God's dwelling place."

Even **exile**—that terrible judgment that scattered Israel—was God's preparation to have a ready-made mission force. And now, scattering and being sent out is not a curse but is God's way of reaching many, and then unifying them again in Jesus Christ and in one body.

A key word is "everyone." Jesus said "whosoever"—"Whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). Peter has that "everyone" or "whosoever" in his sermon. He quotes the prophet Joel: "In the last days I will pour out my Spirit on all people... and everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" (Joel 2:28-32; Acts 2:17-21). "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call" (Acts 2:38-39). Babel scattered people far

off. But now the good news is for all who are far off as well—everybody whom the Lord calls and brings into his covenant.

Today, we are the heirs of that. It's important to know your own story. It's important to know the big story of the Bible and the great events of Pentecost.

Reversing Babel

- **Worship:** Enjoy being God's temple in Christ with people of every nation.
- **Witness:** Live by Spirit's inner law and use his gifts and power to call others.
- **Warfare:** Join God's armies and fight spiritual forces whose claim on any realm is broken by Jesus' victory.

Pentecost only happened once. It doesn't re-happen every day. There was one day when God gave that great outpouring of the Spirit and gathered that ready-made mission force of 3,000 and persuaded them of the truth of the gospel and communicated to each of them in their own language. That was the launching point.

That was a one-time launch, but God does something similar still. He keeps sending people out, keeps translating his gospel into new cultures and into new languages. When we live today in the light of the Holy Spirit's reversal of Babel, we want to have the big picture as well as the individual picture. The individual picture is what the Holy Spirit does in the individual heart—and we should delight to think on that and to rejoice in the presence of the Holy Spirit. But in light of the big picture, I want to highlight three things.

First, in light of the reversal of Babel—**worship**. Enjoy being God's temple in Christ, having him dwell within you, dwell within his church, and dwell within people of every nation. This means that God is to be glorified. It also means that people who are very different from you are to be welcomed in Christ. It is a constant problem for people to despise those who are quite different from them or who come from a nation or background different from their own. But when you know the true and living God, worship unifies. You realize that people from every nation and tribe and language are gathered before God's throne in worship.

Another way that we live in light of the reversal of Babel is by **witness**. You live by the Holy Spirit's inner law. He comes to live within you; he writes his law in your heart. Part of your witness is living to the praise of God, according to the law he's written on your heart. Israel was designed to be a light to the nations—first of all, by being different, by being glorious, by being light. God said to Israel, "I've made you a light to the nations" (Isaiah 42:6; 49:6). Jesus says to his people, "You are the light of the world" (Matthew 5:14). And you are that, first of all, by being like God and imaging him in true righteousness and holiness—living by the inner law. Then the Spirit gives gifts, abilities, and the Spirit gives power to call others. "You will be my witnesses," Jesus said to his disciples, but he first said, "You need power from on high to do that" (Acts 1:8). When you receive the power from on high, then you have the power to call others to Christ.

Finally, in reversing Babel, there is **warfare**. That means there are principalities and powers who don't like losing and who resent territories they once had being taken away. Warfare involves joining God's armies and fighting spiritual forces whose claim on any realm has been broken by Jesus' victory. Whether it is Satan himself or other of the rebel sons of God who want to hang on to territory, they will try to have their way in various aspects of life and among various peoples. They will try to lie to you and still have you think that God doesn't have the full claim on your life. But the Bible says that Jesus' victory has disarmed the powers—the elemental spirits (Colossians 2:15). The only way they can keep a hold on you is if you believe their lies. When you stop believing the lies and know the truth, then you can live in freedom and live under the true King. Then you can enter into your true inheritance.

You and I—as God's church—are meant to rule the affairs of this world. We must now prove faithful in small things, and God will put his people in charge of greater things. But never, ever believe the lies of unseen forces that they have the right to rule. Only God has the right to rule. So worship, witness, and war against evil. Realize that you're in for a fight, but also realize that the one who is in you is greater than all of those powers that are in the world (1 John 4:4).

Prayer

We praise you, Father, for your great and sovereign ways, for your plans that stretch from everlasting to everlasting, for the different dominions and beings that you have formed and created. We thank you for making us to be your imagers here on earth and for redeeming us through Jesus Christ and filling us with your Holy Spirit to restore us again to image you, to be like you, and to consult with you and to govern on your behalf. Lord, sometimes that sounds unrealistic and overwhelming, but we pray that we may even now begin in our own little spheres of influence to live for you by the power of the Holy Spirit and find our influence expanding more and more. You can use things that seem small, insignificant—even a defeat—and turn them for your purposes. And so work your purposes in us, not by our might or power, but by your Spirit. Through Jesus Christ our Lord we pray, Amen.

Reversing Babel

By David Feddes

Slide Contents

Genesis 11:1-9, 12:1-3

^{11:1} Now the whole earth had one language and the same words. ² And as people migrated from the east, they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. ³ And they said to one another, “Come, let us make bricks, and burn them thoroughly.” And they had brick for stone, and bitumen for mortar. ⁴ Then they said, “Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth.” ⁵ And the Lord came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of man had built. ⁶ And the Lord said, “Behold, they are one people, and they have all one language, and this is only the beginning of what they will do. And nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them. ⁷ Come, let us go down and there confuse their language, so that they may not understand one another’s speech.” ⁸ So the Lord dispersed them from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city. ⁹ Therefore its name was called Babel, because there the Lord confused the language of all the earth. And from there the Lord dispersed them over the face of all the earth.

^{12:1} Now the Lord said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. ² And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. ³ I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

God’s imagers and sons

Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth... and all **the sons of God** shouted for joy? (Job 38:4,7)

God said, “**Let us** make man in our image, after our likeness.” (Genesis 1:26)

... Adam, **the son of God**. (Luke 3:38)

Sons of God

The heavens will praise your wonderful deed, O Yahweh, even your faithfulness, in **the assembly of the holy ones**. For who in the sky is equal to Yahweh? Who is like Yahweh among **the sons of God**, a God feared greatly in **the council of the holy ones**, and awesome above all surrounding him? O Yahweh **God of hosts**, who is mighty like you? (Psalm 89:5-8)

Created to be imagers

- Be God's earthly imagers who expand God's garden/temple to fill the earth.
- Earthly imagers would be God's council to interact with Him and act for God on earth, just as heavenly imagers were God's council to consult with God and act for Him in heavenly realms.

Failure and judgment

- Adam and Eve sinned. God's cherubim banned them from garden/temple of Eden.
- Fallen heavenly imagers (sons of God) interbred with human imagers, producing Nephilim giants. God sent the Flood.
- Humanity sinned at Babel. God scattered the nations, disowned them, and gave them over to other supernatural beings.

Stairway from heaven

People at Babel were not trying to build a stairway by which they could climb to heaven; they were building a man-made holy mountain and stairway for the god to come down from heaven to earth. They were trying to control the god for their benefit.



Towers, called ziggurats, were part of Babylonian religion. “The ziggurat was part of a system in which the gods descended to inhabit the image that had been prepared to contain their essence, and through the image the god would be cared for through rituals designed for that purpose.” (John Walton, *The Lost World of the Flood*, p. 133)

Confused and scattered

Come, let us go down and there confuse their language, so that they may not understand one another's speech... And from there the Lord dispersed them over the face of all the earth. (Genesis 11:7-9)

Divided and disowned

When the Most High gave to the nations their inheritance, when he divided mankind, he fixed the borders of the peoples **according to the number of the sons of God**. But the Lord's portion is his people, Jacob his allotted heritage. (Deut 32:8-9)

Divine Council

God (*elohim*) has taken his place in **the divine council**; in the midst of **the gods** (*elohim*) he holds judgment: "How long will you judge unjustly...? **You are gods, sons of the Most High**, all of you; nevertheless, like men you shall die, and fall like any prince." Arise, O God, judge the earth; for you shall inherit all the nations! (Psalm 82)

Divided and disowned

And beware lest you raise your eyes to heaven, and when you see the sun and the moon and the stars, all the host of heaven, you be drawn away and bow down to them and serve them, **things that the Lord your God has allotted to all the peoples** under the whole heaven. (Deuteronomy 4:19)

Watchers and princes

The sentence is by the decree of the watchers, the decision by the word of the holy ones. (Daniel 4:17) Now I will return to fight against the prince of Persia; and when I go out, behold, the prince of Greece will come. (Daniel 10:20)

A chosen people

- Humanity sinned at Babel. God scattered the nations, disowned them, and gave them over to other supernatural beings.
- God chose Abraham's offspring to carry on his purpose for creation, display his glory, and eventually bless all nations.

Conflicts and covenant

- God defeated Egypt's gods and brought his people out (Exodus).
- God and his council came to Sinai, made a covenant with Israel, and gave the tabernacle as a place to live among them.
- God defeated Canaan's gods, destroyed their giant offspring (Nephilim, Anakim), and gave Israel their land. (Joshua)

King, temple, holy land

- Israel did not totally destroy the giants and did not always reject their gods. (Judges)
- Philistine giants remained a threat. King David and his warriors destroyed them.
- Temple was to connect earth and heaven, an earthly picture of heavenly realities.
- Prophets kept calling Israel back to God.

Failure and exile

- Kingdom was divided and corrupted. Ten tribes built their own shrines and were defeated and deported. Later the kingdom of Judah was defeated, the temple was destroyed, and the Jews were exiled.
- Some exiles returned and built a lesser temple. But many Jews remained scattered, and nations were not blessed.

Messiah

- Jesus, Son of God, second Adam, prophet like Moses, Son of David, true temple, was faithful to God's purposes.
- Jesus' death paid for human sin and defeated the rebel supernatural beings.
- Jesus' resurrection launched a new creation in the Spirit's life and power.

Messianic missionaries

- Israel's exile was punishment for sin but also preparation for blessing all nations.
- Many Jews were in Jerusalem during the Pentecost feast, "devout men from every nation under heaven." (Acts 2:5)
- In one day the Holy Spirit made them an army of 3,000 Messianic missionaries familiar with many cultures.

Acts 2:1-12

¹ When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. ² And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. ³ And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. ⁴ And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.

⁵ Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. ⁶ And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language. ⁷ And they were amazed and astonished,

saying, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? ⁸ And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? ⁹ Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰ Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, ¹¹ both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians—we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God.” ¹² And all were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “What does this mean?” ¹³ But others mocking said, “They are filled with new wine.”

Pentecost vs. Babel

- At Babel people build a manmade holy mountain, a stairway for gods to descend to their temple and image.
- On Pentecost God’s Holy Spirit enters his true image and temple, the people of his church headed by Jesus.
- At Babel people want to control the god and make a name for themselves.
- On Pentecost God the Spirit fills people and glorifies the name of Jesus.
- Babel was Great Symbiosis: gods made us to feed and care for them, and if we satisfy them, they will also care for us.
- Pentecost was God’s covenant of grace: God does not need us but offers his love in Christ as a free gift and calls us to rule and care for creation on his behalf.
- At Babel God comes down to judge and weaken rebel humans.
- On Pentecost God comes down to bless and empower believing humans.
- At Babel God confuses. He blocks sinful rebels from speaking the same language in their idol building and pride.
- On Pentecost God enlightens. The Spirit enables Jesus’ disciples to praise and preach in other languages, and hearers understand and accept the gospel.
- At Babel God divides one group into many nations and scatters them.
- On Pentecost God gathers many nations into one church and unifies them.
- At Babel God hands all nations over to the rule of lesser supernatural beings (and starts over with Abraham/Israel).
- On Pentecost God calls nations away from evil powers and offers the nations his presence and covenant promises.

Spirit renews all things

- Eden: breathing life into God’s imagers
- Babel: communicating, unifying, sending

- Israel: chosen nation to bless all nations
- Sinai: new covenant law written on hearts
- Temple: Jesus, church and believers
- Exile: ready-made mission force

Everyone

In the last days, I will pour out my Spirit on all people... And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved... Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call. (Acts 2:17-39)

Reversing Babel

- **Worship:** Enjoy being God's temple in Christ with people of every nation.
- **Witness:** Live by Spirit's inner law and use his gifts and power to call others.
- **Warfare:** Join God's armies and fight spiritual forces whose claim on any realm is broken by Jesus' victory.

Sources:

G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology*

Michael Heiser, *The Unseen Realm*

Michael Heiser, What Really Happened at the Tower of Babel?

John Walton, *The Lost World of the Flood*